

**Daniel**  
**Chapter 5**  
**“Counted, Counted, Weighed, and Divided”**

**Daniel 5**

**The Writing on the Wall**

**5 King Belshazzar gave a great banquet for a thousand of his nobles and drank wine with them. 2 While Belshazzar was drinking his wine, he gave orders to bring in the gold and silver goblets that Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken from the temple in Jerusalem, so that the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines might drink from them. 3 So they brought in the gold goblets that had been taken from the temple of God in Jerusalem, and the king and his nobles, his wives and his concubines drank from them. 4 As they drank the wine, they praised the gods of gold and silver, of bronze, iron, wood and stone.**

**5 Suddenly the fingers of a human hand appeared and wrote on the plaster of the wall, near the lampstand in the royal palace. The king watched the hand as it wrote. 6 His face turned pale and he was so frightened that his legs became weak and his knees were knocking.**

**7 The king summoned the enchanters, astrologers and diviners. Then he said to these wise men of Babylon, “Whoever reads this writing and tells me what it means will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around his neck, and he will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”**

**8 Then all the king’s wise men came in, but they could not read the writing or tell the king what it meant. 9 So King Belshazzar became even more terrified and his face grew more pale. His nobles were baffled.**

**10 The queen, hearing the voices of the king and his nobles, came into the banquet hall. “May the king live forever!” she said. “Don’t be alarmed! Don’t look so pale! 11 There is a man in your kingdom who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. In the time of your father he was found to have insight and intelligence and wisdom like that of the gods. Your father, King Nebuchadnezzar, appointed him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners. 12 He did this because Daniel, whom the king called Beltshazzar, was found to have a keen mind and knowledge and understanding, and also the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems. Call for Daniel, and he will tell you what the writing means.”**

**13 So Daniel was brought before the king, and the king said to him, “Are you Daniel, one of the exiles my father the king brought from Judah? 14 I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom. 15 The wise men and enchanters were brought before me to read this writing and tell me what it means, but they could not explain it. 16 Now I have heard that you are able to give interpretations and to solve difficult problems. If you can read this writing and tell me what it means, you will be clothed in purple and have a gold chain placed around your neck, and you will be made the third highest ruler in the kingdom.”**

**17 Then Daniel answered the king, “You may keep your gifts for yourself and give your rewards to someone else. Nevertheless, I will read the writing for the king and tell him what it means.**

**18 “Your Majesty, the Most High God gave your father Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty and greatness and glory and splendor. 19 Because of the high position he gave him, all the nations and peoples of every language dreaded and feared him. Those the king wanted to put to death, he put to death; those he wanted to spare, he spared; those he wanted to promote, he promoted; and those he wanted to humble, he humbled. 20 But when his heart became arrogant and hardened with pride, he was deposed from his royal throne and stripped of his glory. 21 He was driven away from people and given the mind of an animal; he lived with the wild donkeys and ate grass like the ox; and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven, until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and sets over them anyone he wishes.**

**22 “But you, Belshazzar, his son, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. 23 Instead, you have set yourself up against the Lord of heaven. You had the goblets from his temple brought to you, and you and your nobles, your wives and your concubines drank wine from them. You praised the gods of silver and gold, of bronze, iron, wood and stone, which cannot see or hear or understand. But you did not honor the God who holds in his hand your life and all your ways. 24 Therefore he sent the hand that wrote the inscription.**

**25 “This is the inscription that was written: mene, mene, tekel, parsin**

**26 “Here is what these words mean:**

**Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end.**

**27 Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting.**

**28 Peres: Your kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”**

**29 Then at Belshazzar’s command, Daniel was clothed in purple, a gold chain was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed the third highest ruler in the kingdom.**

**30 That very night Belshazzar, king of the Babylonians, was slain, 31 and Darius the Mede took over the kingdom, at the age of sixty-two.**

## **Introduction**

**Sharpen the arrows, take up the shields! The Lord has stirred up the kings of the Medes, for His purpose is to destroy Babylon. The Lord will take vengeance, vengeance for His temple. Jeremiah 51:11**

King Nebuchadnezzar had been dead and buried for some twenty-three years on the night that his grandson Belshazzar decided to throw his infamous party (He is referred to as Nebuchadnezzar's son in **verse 11** because there is no word in Chaldee or Hebrew for "grandfather"). He had been left in Babylon to govern during perilous times by his father Nabonidus, who never really had the stomach for life at court. Nabonidus was Nebuchadnezzar's son-in-law who rose to power after the assassination of Nebuchadnezzar's son Evil-Merodach. Evil-Merodach reigned for two years upon Nebuchadnezzar's passing before he was assassinated by his brother-in-law Neriglasser. Neriglasser attempted to install his son Labashi-Marduk as king, but he was subsequently murdered by a band of conspirators which included Nabonidus himself, who assumed the throne in 556 BC.

The Medo-Persian empire was as prophesied by Jeremiah, rising up to take its place as the most powerful force upon the earth. One of the obstacles standing in the way of its dominance, was Babylon. While King Nabonidus was occupying himself with his travel and business endeavors, he appointed young Belshazzar to be his vice-regent during his many absences from Babylon. When the forces of the Medes and Persians began encroaching upon his beloved capital city, Nabonidus' grand defensive strategy was to round up all the idols he could find in the neighboring cities and bring them to Babylon, leaving them to defend the city as he fled, and charging his son with the difficult task of fending off the invading armies led by Cyrus the Persian who was the nephew of Darius the Mede.

Belshazzar was under the false impression that the walls of Babylon could not be breached by the invading army so he decided to entrench himself within the great city and wait out the attack, assuming the ambitious Cyrus would simply give up hope and return home. The city of Babylon had an adequate supply of food and water, and surely the invaders would eventually run out of the resources needed to re-supply the troops, forcing their inevitable retreat. Babylon he believed, was an impregnable fortress, a rock that Cyrus would break himself upon, rewarding him with nothing more than shame and disgrace for his efforts. Belshazzar merely needed a diversion, something to pass the time until his ultimate victory celebration was made official. So he had an idea: Why not throw a party to boost the morale of his nobles? While the hapless Cyrus suffered another cold frustrating night outside the city walls with his soldiers, the Babylonian aristocracy would eat, drink, and be merry!

## **The Banquet**

It becomes obvious by reading the text that Belshazzar had never heard of Daniel, for the prophet had not been invited to the King's grand ball. Daniel was well into his eighties by now and had apparently been forgotten by the royal establishment. The wisest man in the land had been put out to pasture as it were. Perhaps it was the foolishness of King Nabonidus who wished to remove every last vestige of Nebuchadnezzar's "brain trust" from his cabinet, or possibly the old man had just been allowed to retire from service. Whatever the reason, when the party begins, Daniel is nowhere to be found.

In his book "The Handwriting On The Wall", Dr. David Jeremiah makes the point that when the world has a party, they make it a point not to include the people of God on the guest list. It is when the party is over and trouble comes, that the counsel of the godly is often sought out. As Christians, we should take comfort in this fact. We are called to be salt and light in this world. This becomes much harder when we behave just like the world does. We wouldn't enjoy their parties anyway, because the children of God can't find pleasure in wickedness. Our old sinful nature can no longer satisfy, in fact it never really did. That is why we were drawn to Jesus in the first place. I'm sure that Daniel had much rather been at home reading the scrolls of Jeremiah anyway. For in them he would find solace in knowing the seventy years of captivity was now at an end, and the final judgement of Babylon was at hand.

If Belshazzar had been a student of Jeremiah, he probably would have never thought it a wise to bring out the gold and silver goblets that had been taken from God's temple in Jerusalem to toast the idols standing around the massive banquet hall. These goblets were holy remnants of the time when God's presence was among his chosen people. They had been consecrated for a holy purpose. They belonged to God, not to the kings of Babylon. God had allowed Jerusalem and its temple to be destroyed as a punishment for the sins of Israel. He had NOT abandoned His children however, and had certainly not given leave for Belshazzar to blaspheme his Holy Name by toasting his pagan gods and mocking The Living God. Jeremiah had predicted that the Medes would destroy Babylon after the seventy years of Jewish captivity had been fulfilled (***Jeremiah 51:11***), so this was definitely not a good time to entice the wrath of God. It WOULD have been a good time to beg for His mercy instead, but Belshazzar foolishly believed that the statues Nabonidus had left surrounding the banquet hall were all he needed to save him. He was sadly mistaken.

In his drunken stupor, the fool Belshazzar had the sacred goblets filled with wine, instructing his nobles, his wives, and his concubines (leaving us to wonder just what kind of party this was), to drink to the worthless idols of the Babylonians. He was not only worshipping lifeless statues, which is dumb enough in and of itself, but he was also mocking the God of the Hebrews by using His sacred vessels to make the toast. In short, he was declaring the gods of Babylon to be superior to The Most High God.

You would think that with the Persian General Cyrus scheming outside his walls, even this pagan would think it unwise to purposely incite the anger of the Hebrew God even IF he did not worship Him! Maybe had he been sober his reasoning would have been clearer. This did not however, excuse his blasphemy in the eyes of The Lord. There is an old Latin legal tenant that says, "*Qui peccat ebrius, luat sobrius*" (Let him who sins when drunk, be punished when sober). King Belshazzar had sinned horribly in the midst of his drunken revelry. However, he quickly found himself terrified into sobriety. God would write the penalty for his crimes upon the wall in plain view for the king and his heathen nobles. It was a bill that he would pay with his very life.

## **The Bill**

Just as the grand ball was reaching its pinnacle of debauchery, the fingers of a man's hand mysteriously appeared and began writing upon the wall by the lampstand (***vs.5***). God did not want Belshazzar to miss the message, so He wrote it where the light from the lampstand would indelibly shine upon it. The Word of God has always been a light for a darkened world (***Psalms 119:105***). In this case however, it was too late for King Belshazzar to repent, for the lighted inscription upon the palace wall brought a message of impending doom. Some have suggested that the message was encrypted in some mysterious way which prevented the king, his nobles, and wise men from being able to read it (***vs.7-8***). I believe the writing was plain enough for them to read for it was written in Aramaic, a language which was all too familiar to them. The problem was they simply could not understand its meaning. The message for

all intents and purposes appeared to be monetary in nature. Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. These are all references to currency in the Aramaic language. Mene, is a number of reckoning meaning "fifty shekels". The "shekel" was a unit of weight by which the value of silver and gold was determined, much like we would measure gold by the ounce. The word Tekel is actually the Aramaic word for "shekel" which means quite literally "to weigh". "Parsin" was a word used to represent 25 shekels. The word means "division". It was used to signify one half of the standard fifty shekel weight, much like we would say "a half dollar". When God wrote these words upon the palace wall, it was as if He was saying to the foolish king, "So you want to toast your worthless gods with My sacred vessels? That's fine by Me. Here is your bill, fifty shekels, fifty shekels, one shekel, and twenty five shekels!" None of the wise men could discern the meaning of this "bill" from God. They only knew that it carried an ominous message, for otherwise the king would not have been so terrified (Not to mention the whole "hand without a body" writing it out!) Belshazzar promised that anyone who could interpret the mysterious writing would receive a promotion to third highest in the kingdom (just below himself and King Nabonidus).

Possibly upon hearing the commotion, the queen came into the banquet hall in an attempt to calm Belshazzar's fragile nerves. Some have said that this is quite possibly Belshazzar's grandmother, the widow of Nebuchadnezzar himself. Though plausible, I instead believe it was the wife of Nabonidus, Belshazzar's mother, who would have been the reigning queen at the time. She was the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar whom Nabonidus had married for political reasons, no doubt in order to help him usurp the throne from the sons of Nebuchadnezzar. Whichever the case may be, the "queen mother" told Belshazzar of an old man named Daniel who was among the Hebrew exiles that possessed incredible powers of discernment in matters such as these. The king immediately sent for Daniel in the hope that he might be able to decipher the riddle upon the wall.

Upon Daniel's arrival, the king confirmed that he was in fact the former advisor to the late Nebuchadnezzar (**vs. 13**), and then went on to promise the old prophet both gifts and the aforementioned promotion if he could explain the writing on the wall. Daniel declined the king's rewards, for upon reading the mysterious script, he became fully aware that a promotion in the Babylonian regime was soon to be worthless. He told the king that he should have heeded the lessons of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar and humbled himself before Almighty God (**vs. 18-23**). He then explained the penalty for his actions because he had not. "Mene, Mene"; You have been counted and recounted by God, and your worth has not measured up. "Tekel"; your actions and transgressions have been weighed in the sight of heaven, and are found to be lacking. "Upharsin", your kingdom is to be divided on this night between the Medes and the Persians.

Unbeknownst to Belshazzar, while he had been partying with his rowdy friends, General Cyrus troops were diverting the water from the Euphrates river that ran underneath the city walls of Babylon. Once the water had been rerouted, his army was able to advance in the riverbed and enter the unsuspecting city by going under its massive wall. The city was taken by complete surprise and fell that same night into the hands of the General Cyrus the Persian who claimed it in the name of King Darius the Mede (**5:31**). This was the same Cyrus, King of Persia who decreed in the **First Chapter of Ezra**, that the Jews be allowed to rebuild their temple in Jerusalem (**Ezra 1:1-4**). One hundred and fifty years before Cyrus was even born, the prophet Isaiah had prophesied of him BY NAME, and his coming to rescue the Jews (**Isaiah 44:28**). The word of God is always true. Case in point, Belshazzar was executed on that fateful night, and the great city became the shared real estate of the Medo-Persian Empire, just as the handwriting upon the wall had promised. The seventy years of Babylonian captivity had come to an end, and God avenged the burning of His Holy Temple. As a result, most people in all walks of life including even the most ungodly throughout the world are well acquainted with the phrase, "The Handwriting on The Wall!"

And all God's people say... Amen!